

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 THE COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN**

A Comprehensive Master Plan is an officially adopted public document which establishes long term goals and policies for the City. The plan itself includes an analysis of and recommendations for the use of land and the improvement of the transportation system, the provision of community facilities, the economy, housing, and the environment. It is used as a policy statement aimed at the unified and coordinated development of the City. The long-range policies within the plan can be continually referred to by decision-makers in considering items regarding development. The plan will also be used to guide the location, development and maintenance of the many facilities and services provided by the City. As such, the Comprehensive Plan will be one of the main policy tools of the City Council, the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, the City's administration, and the Division of Planning and Development as well as other City boards and departments.

The City has many kinds of plans for parks, streets, utilities, land use, etc. The Master Plan encompasses these categorical plans and provides a means for relating them to one another. The Master Plan is not designed to replace those studies but should be used to complement and recommend future needed studies. It should be realized that the Plan is more than a sum of these components; it is a unified vision of the future of the City. The term "planning process" suggests the on-going, cyclical nature of planning and, in general, it attempts to answer a series of questions:

- What are the existing conditions with regard to population, housing, land use, transportation, etc. (Inventory)
- What do we anticipate in years to come in terms of population growth, housing changes, public facilities, etc. (Analyses and Forecasting)
- What do we want and need for the future? For example, what do the citizens want or expect Lowell to be like in the future with regard to neighborhoods, parks, employment opportunities, etc. (Goal Setting)
- How can internal City operations be improved to strategically implement the goals? (Management Improvement)
- How do we accomplish the desired future end? This is the overall strategy or plan, intended to create the conditions wanted. (The Comprehensive Plan itself)
- What detailed studies and programs are necessary to meet the goals of the Plan? (Plan Implementation)
- Is the Plan working? Is it effectively achieving our desired goals? (Plan Monitoring)

By regularly reviewing and referring to the Plan, decision-makers can keep the Plan current. Future updates to the Master Plan will be necessary since long-range planning is a continuous process.

### **1.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

As the first product of Lowell's Comprehensive Master Plan process, this Existing Conditions Report is intended to provide a snapshot of Lowell today. It is a compilation of data and information collected by the Division of Planning and Development that will serve as the foundation of our visioning and planning where Lowell is headed in the future. In some cases information has been collected through first-hand observations and other primary research (including traffic counts, land use, and public opinion data). In other cases, we have relied on statistics from various sources including the US Census Bureau.

### 1.3 REGIONAL CONTEXT

Lowell, Massachusetts, the nation's first successful planned industrial community, is located in northern Middlesex County in the northeastern section of Massachusetts. The city is bisected by the Merrimack River and is located approximately 25 miles north of Boston. Lowell has a land area of 13.38 square miles with the remaining 0.89 square miles covered by surface water. The total area within the Lowell city border is 14.27 square miles. The major bodies of water that have had tremendous impact on the development and success of the City area are the Merrimack River and the Concord River.

The city is a diverse urban/suburban community built primarily around the extensive industrial mill complexes along the Merrimack River. The industrial revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century gave the city its economic base, heritage, and character that are still prevalent today. Today, the city can be characterized as a highly urbanized community surrounded by wealthier suburban white-collar communities. Lowell is surrounded by the suburban communities of Tewksbury, Chelmsford, Dracut, and Tyngsborough, communities with extensive open land testifying to their rural, agricultural past.

### 1.4 HISTORY

As America's most significant planned industrial community, Lowell dramatically illustrates the country's transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. The physical remains of Lowell's industrial past – 5.6 miles of canal ways, lock chambers, mills, boarding houses, bridges, and machinery – are monuments to the American Industrial Revolution. Lowell was America's first large scale planned industrial community. It was incorporated as a city in 1826. Its mills helped transform American life with high volume mechanized manufacturing, the rise of the large corporation, and the growth of an urban working class. The rich diversity of Lowell's subsequent growth and development is displayed in the central business district and surrounding ethnic neighborhoods.

The "Venice of America", as Lowell was known, was remarkable among 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial cities for its quick ascent to fame, the symbolic value it held for America concerned with large scale industrialization, and the sheer enormity of its industrial processes. This success largely rested on certain advantages of people, place and timing.

By 1840, Lowell had become the principal manufacturing center of the United States and the model for many similar ventures. The transformation from rural community to industrial mecca occurred in less than two decades. This was among the most rapid industrialization processes the country has ever experienced.

Lowell's geographical location at the confluence of the Merrimack and Concord Rivers attracted settlers to its banks for approximately 10,000 years. The site first served as an ideal location for Native American fishing camps. Early English settlers made use of the rich farmland along the rivers' floodplains that later led to the location of one of America's first planned industrial communities. The two rivers provided an abundance of inexpensive yet reliable waterpower for the mills, the level terrain simplified subsequent construction, and the city had convenient access to Boston via the Middlesex Canal and to Newburyport via the Pawtucket Canal and the Merrimack River.

Lowell's designers awarded mill sites and canal routes their highest priority. To facilitate the use of river power, mill complexes were constructed along the banks of the Merrimack and Concord

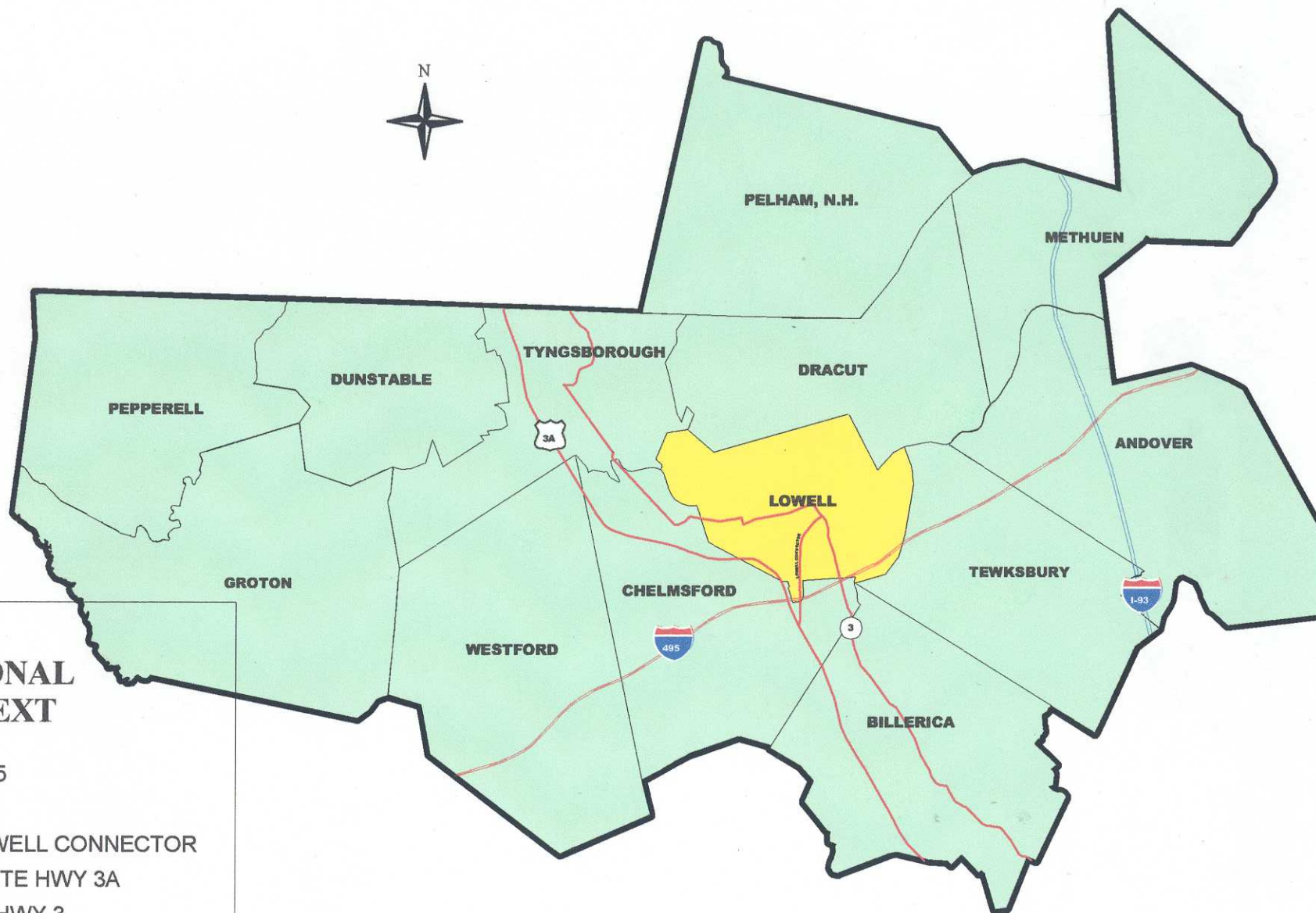
Rivers, where the force of the water courses were greatest. As more corporations were founded, an intricate system of canals continued to evolve to provide the necessary power. Eventually, 10 canals were constructed, and as they fanned out across the landscape, they cut the city into seven islands. The rest of the community developed within the confines of the V-shaped wall formed by the mills. Here, behind the wall of mills, the corporations established the residential communities that housed mill employees and led to the formation of ethnic neighborhoods.

With the expansion of the mills during the 1830s and 1840s, a large middle class grew in three adjoining areas. Chapel Hill (today's Back Central) was the first neighborhood to develop. From here, development spread to the Lowell Belvidere section of the city. In 1834, the remaining land above Nesmith Street was annexed to the city then sold to developers for expensive homes during the 1840's. Centralville settled next and annexed to Lowell in 1851. The introduction of the streetcar in the 1890's led to the development of Lowell's outlying areas, such as Tyler Park in the Highlands neighborhood. Pawtucketville became a part of the city in 1874.

As industrial output continued to expand, Lowell's work force changed from Yankee women to foreign born, and by the 1860s the industrial system could not keep pace with the very forces it had generated. As the 19<sup>th</sup> Century progressed, conditions in mills and corporate boarding houses became worse as overcrowding became prevalent. Tenement buildings were constructed throughout the city, and the neighborhoods grew to their present size.

Shortly after the turn of the century, Lowell's status was diminished when the use of alternate forms of power production became widespread. Also it was practical for many aging textile concerns to move south, where raw materials and labor were less expensive. For several decades, the city's economy stagnated and the mills and canals fell into disrepair. It would be many decades before efforts were initiated to reuse these impressive facilities.

Beginning in the 1970s, Lowell has experienced a remarkable rebirth and revitalization. The designation of an urban National Park to celebrate Lowell's industrial heritage, along with complimentary local and state efforts to promote historic preservation and heritage tourism have stimulated a remarkable restoration of the downtown core. A diversification of the local economy including the technology, education, and health care sectors has broadened the job base beyond its traditional manufacturing core. Since the early 1980s wave of immigration, especially from Southeast Asia and Latin America, has sustained and increased the City's population and continued its proud tradition as a welcoming community for immigrants. The City's return to prominence was capped by the construction of the Tsongas Arena and LeLacheur Park baseball stadium and its recognition as an All-America City in 1999.



## REGIONAL CONTEXT

-  I 495
-  I 93
-  LOWELL CONNECTOR
-  STATE HWY 3A
-  US HWY 3



## REGIONAL CONTEXT

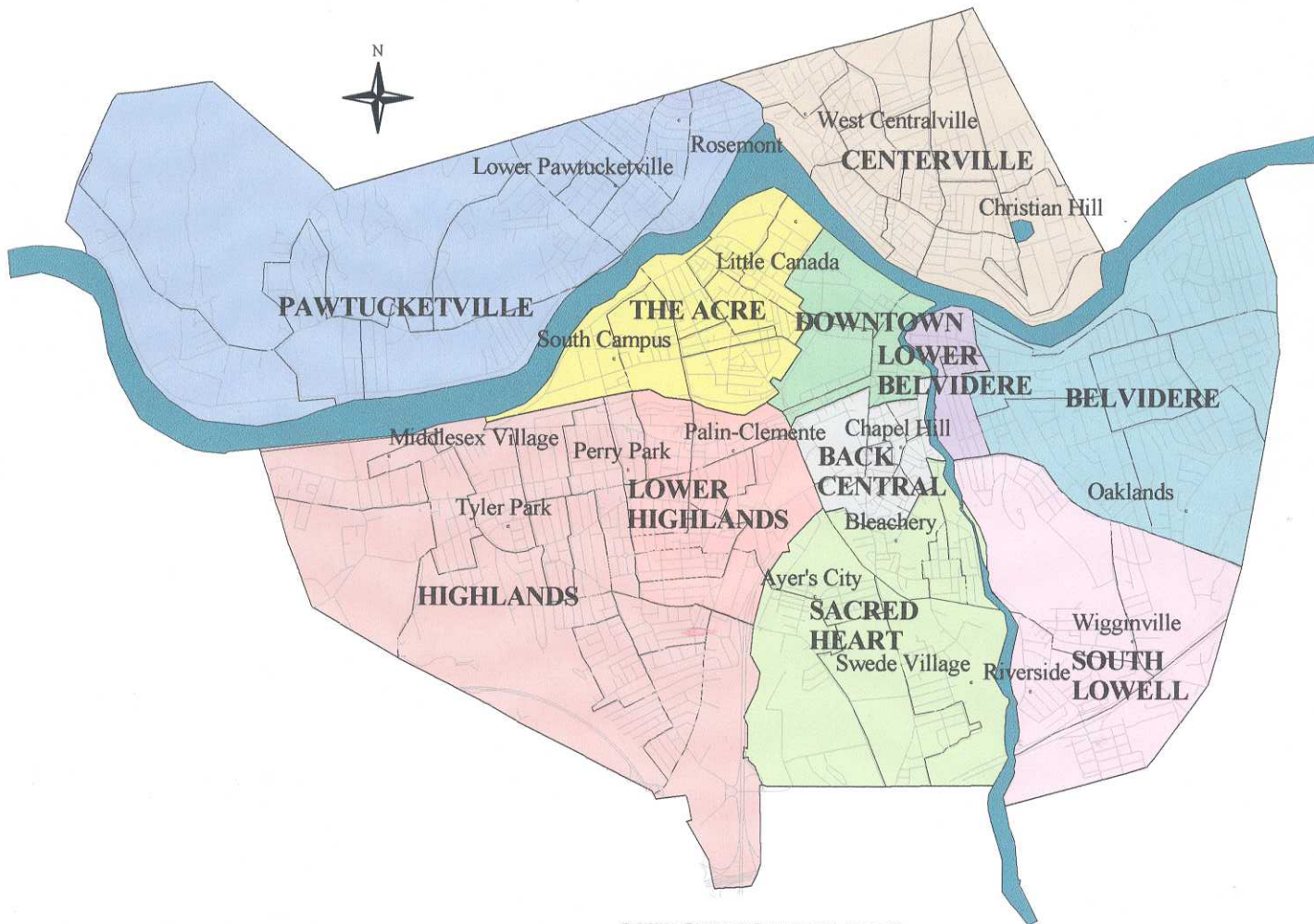
### Lowell COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

January 2002 Existing Data

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Division of Planning  
and Development



## NEIGHBORHOODS

Lowell COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
January 2002 Existing Conditions

